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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7942
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0395
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0317
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0371
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 1913
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0704
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
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RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0437
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0812

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000741

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/16/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: AHMED OULD DADDAH SEES POLITICAL LETHARGY

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 590

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Leader of the Opposition Ahmed Ould Daddah continues to try to stake out a middle option between the military and President Abdallahi. Ould Daddah sees little chance of political movement in the near future but sees the economic cards stacked against General Aziz. While disagreeing with the U.S. on the need for Abdallahi's return, Ould Daddah praises U.S. insistence that the military quit politics. He sees to upcoming National Dialogue on Democracy as theater and will only participate if the military accepts conditions he knows they won't. Ould Daddah supports targeted sanctions. End Summary

¶2. (C) Charge met December 16 with RFD Party President and official Leader of the Opposition Ahmed Ould Daddah at RFD party headquarters. This was the first substantive meeting since mid-October (REFTEL). Ould Daddah said he saw political lethargy in the current situation with lots of "activity" but little action. Seeing no interest in real dialogue between the military and the FNDD, he said he was somewhat at a loss to see a resolution in the short term.

¶3. (C) Ould Daddah said he had dined the night before with General Aziz to see if there was any movement on the General's side -- the dinner did not seem to go well. Ould Daddah had found no indication the General was prepared to cede power and get the military out of politics -- points he saw as preconditions for his support for the transition route being presented by Aziz. At the same time, Ould Daddah said he had failed in efforts to develop any real dialogue between the military and the FNDD -- the regime was willing but the FNDD not (Charge noted this would be consistent with President Abdallahi's position that any negotiation with the military legitimizes the coup). Ould Daddah said that, under the circumstances, his strategy continued to be to stake out a position in the middle -- neither willing to work with the military nor going all out against them. Ould Daddah said his party would serve as the "alliance" (rassemblement) between the two sides "as is in the title of our party."

¶4. (C) Ould Daddah, an economist by training, said he had warned Aziz that the economy is working against him after the initial political windfall Aziz got after the coup from falling world food and energy prices. Ould Daddah warned that 2009 will be extremely difficult for Mauritania

economically since all the main sources of revenue were shrinking -- iron ore and copper prices are dropping and oil revenues will be sharply reduced. Ould Daddah cautioned that even Mauritania's current modest oil production (around 13,000 barrels per day) could be suspended as uneconomical (Comment: An expatriate close to the petroleum industry made the same observation to Charge. The off-shore production was originally estimated as profitable on the assumption of production of 75,000 barrels per say at \$45 per barrel. Last year remained marginally profitable at the lower production rate because of the markedly higher world price for oil. It was estimated oil operator PETRONAS would suspend operations if faced with both low production and low sales price. End Comment). Ould Daddah told Aziz that left only fishing revenue which his regime had effectively botched by setting an unrealistically high price on the full warehouses of fish that nobody is willing to buy. Ould Daddah told Aziz any money he has to work with will soon be gone and, with it, his ability to engage in the populist politics he has used over the past months. Ould Daddah noted to Charge that, with the possible exception of the fish debacle, Abdallahi would have faced the same world economic picture but that now Aziz owns the problem.

15. (C) Ould Daddah said his party would determine its position on the upcoming National Dialogue on Democracy in coming days. He saw the Dialogue as presented so far as a charade -- noting Laghdaf was talking about the results of the Dialogue (early elections) before the meeting already started. He saw the Dialogue being set up as "a collection of insignificant parties and NGOs that have no grounds to

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talk about politics" that will deliver a pre-arranged conclusion heading to new elections. As for those elections, he said that "any election organized while either of the two generals in control can have no credibility." That said, Ould Daddah said the party would likely not "reject the Dialogue completely" but condition participation on the High State Council giving a firm and early date for being dissolved and committing that no member of the Council will run for president. He had little expectation Aziz would accept either condition.

16. (C) Ould Daddah praised the U.S. for maintaining an unwavering demand for the departure of the military from politics. He worried that the French, while they had started with some same attitude, seemed increasingly willing to accept a military government or some sham government controlled by the military. Ould Daddah disagreed with the U.S. position that the return to constitutional order naturally required the return of President Abdallahi (saying an interim government under the President of the Senate met the constitutional requirement), but still saw the U.S. position to date as having been extremely important. Ould Daddah added that he was confident the African Union would proceed with sanctions and hopeful the Europeans would do the same -- but in the case of the Europeans not until the end of the 120 day Article 96 dialogue process in late January. Ould Daddah supports targeted sanctions for the political and psychological effect -- particularly sanctions against financial supporters.

17. (C) Ould Daddah saw the Europeans as being misguided by the thought that a military regime offered greater stability and security. Noting that the problems of terrorism, drug trafficking and alien smuggling had emerged under previous military rule, Ould Daddah said the military could not ensure security because (a) it could never build political consensus and common cause around itself, and (b) because its attention on political power necessarily diverts attentions and resources from its legitimate military missions. Ould Daddah saw those military missions were more important now than at any time in Mauritania's history but could not be met by Aziz as head of state. Charge added that the U.S. also saw military governments as aggravating internal radicalization

which we see as the greater long-term security threat. Ould Daddah said he agreed absolutely.

18. (C) Ould Daddah continued to see Abdallahi as being in many ways as much a cause of the coup as Aziz by having, in the first place, accepted military political and financial support and then managed his office abysmally. He told Charge "I have absolutely no respect for Sidi" and noted his offense in reported statements from Abdallahi that he would, "talk to anyone except Ould Daddah. He added that he would meet with Abdallahi if invited but didn't expect the invitation. From his dinner with Aziz the night before, Ould Daddah believed Abdallahi would indeed be released "unconditionally" by December 24. He suggested Abdallahi would be able to do political activities but opined "nobody will really come out for him anymore."

HANKINS